



***Ways of Immediate Policies, Mechanisms and  
Measures to Protect Women & Reduce COVID-19  
Pandemic Effect on Egyptian Family***

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*In confronting COVID-19 Egypt has started some human rights and gender-sensitive measures and decisions on the top of which is the decision of the Prime Minister to give pregnant female employee or who takes care of a child who is less than 12 years old an exceptional leave within the state precautionary measures to confront COVID-19. In addition, the Prime Minister's decision also includes the reduction of employees' number in governmental bodies and departments within a package of precautionary measures followed by the state to prevent COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.*

*This decision takes into consideration the best interest of the Egyptian family in the first place and sends a message of reassurance to women and mothers followed the decision of suspending study for two weeks. Also article no. 9 of the decision states that exceptional leaves given according to this decision are paid and are not considered within legal leaves and vacations or do not affect any of the employees' financial dues.*

*The decision comes out of and consistent with the National Strategy for Empowering Egyptian Women 2030 whose preamble quotes part of the president's speech on Egyptian Women Day in 2017: "national duty and responsibility in front of history necessitate us to accelerate steps to empower women and preserve their rights and place them in a position which fits their values, capacities and sacrifices throughout history".*

*In the same context, the decision of the Minister of Social Solidarity comes to increase the number of beneficiary families from program of social protection "Takaful and Karama" (solidarity and dignity) during March 2020 to reach 3 million and 400 thousand families which equal about 15 million citizens. This comes within the state interest in widening social protection umbrella.*

*Yet it seems that to reduce this virus effect and risk on women and Egyptian family we need more immediate interventions.*

*A recent study, which has been conducted on 44.600 people who infected with COVID19 and which has been conducted by the Chinese Center for Disease Control, has revealed mortality rate among men was 2.8% compared to 1.7% as mortality rate among women. Yet which is not clear is that the virus affects women the most. According to WHO, women represent the majority employees in social and health care sector with 70% in 104 countries whose data was analyzed by WHO; the matter which put them in confrontation with this virus infection although women's income is less than that of men*



with 11% in the same field. On the other hand, pregnant women face totally different challenges especially as they do not exactly know how COVID-19 will affect their children.

### **Unpaid Care**

According to International Labour Organization, women and girls actually do most of the unpaid work in the world as women do 76.2% of the total hours of unpaid care work i.e. three times more than men. Moreover, the vast majority of hosts, teachers and employees in service sector are females whose jobs put them in the frontlines of the virus outbreak and at home women still do more care work. So when the virus suspends schools, decreases travelling and exposes old people relatives to danger, women have more to do. Besides, the virus outbreak may negatively and disproportionately affect economic level of women who represent most part-time employees and unofficial employees all over the world. These kinds of job are usually the first to be abandoned during crises.

### ***The most important negative effects of COVID-19 combating measures on women***

#### **Doubling unpaid care burdens done by women**

Care works, on the top of which are taking care of children, old people and people with disabilities, are all unpaid works whose responsibilities are not distributed equally between men and women, yet women bear the most of them. In addition, the curfew has doubled the responsibilities of women and girls including studying for children at homes because of schools' closure.

#### **Increased risk of women and children being exposed to domestic violence**

Women and children in families which suffer from domestic violence and lack of food supplies due to obligatory quarantine are exposed to possibility of increased violence against women and children. Yet psychological stress makes domestic violence possible even in the safest families.

In a related context, the current circumstances may lead to spreading domestic violence against women since men feel stresses in facing economic difficulties resulted from the



*virus outbreak and inability to work along with long quarantine period; the matter which yields family tensions and conflicts inside one home.*

*In addition, women face another kind of violence in electronic space as along with restrictions imposed on transportations there has been an increase in using social media websites, chats and games; the matter which facilitates electronic harassments. Hence it is necessary to be careful to protect girls.*

### **Negative impact on economic participation of women**

*Women suffer from weak economic participation yet COVID-19 and followed measures to combat it weaken economic empowerment for them especially as most of them work in unofficial sector and do not have any kind of social protection. Also as a result of COVID-19 a lot of husbands have to work from home through internet; the matter which represent burden for some women who do their house works and take care of their children after school closure and some of them have to leave their work to care their families till the end of COVID-19 crisis.*

*On the other hand, within this crisis the real danger is for women who cannot have paid leave and whose work cannot be done from home such as daily wage female workers, female house workers, small businesswomen, female workers in the cleaning sectors, food preparation and saleswomen since women represent the most ratio of workers in sector of service and unofficial economy in the world.*

### **Female House Workers and Daily Agricultural Female Workers**

*In addition to depriving them from legal protection, private labor law has excluded female house workers and daily agricultural workers from applying the law on them. So within the current circumstances of COVID-19, these female workers face many problems on the top of which is getting their salaries on time to give them to their families who depend on them in fulfilling their daily needs. Also female house workers in particular face a lot of stresses because of increased house work and burdens which affect their psychological and physical conditions besides working within conditions which do not guarantee protection against virus infection.*



### **Affecting Reproductive Health Services**

*WHO has declared that pregnant women are one of the most vulnerable categories to be infected with COVID-19 and the danger is increased when considering other aspects such as pregnant women's need to prenatal care including periodical following up and analysis which women cannot get it very well because of the widespread virus. Besides, some countries where the pandemic spread have to recruit and dedicate efforts and resources of health services to critical care services away from other care fields. So reproductive and sexual health services are often ignored in crises times while women are still in need of providing contraceptives and other services related to their reproductive and sexual health. These needs are affected by lack of supplies resulted from responding to the virus and the danger here is doubled when a pregnant woman works in health field where she cannot get a leave because health sector need everyone within the current crisis.*

### **Poor Communication & Providing Guidelines to Prevent COVID-19 for Different Categories**

*Guidelines of preventing COVID-19 may not access all society's categories while many categories should be taken into consideration and who are in need of special guidelines such as people with disabilities, illiterate people, old people and people in faraway regions. Radio is an important source for information for all people in general and for women and girls in particular as it reaches all rural and faraway areas and all homes. It has a prominent role in emergency conditions or weather condition. In addition, radio also enhances freedom of expression and encourages mutual respect and understanding among different cultures.*

### **Poor Representation of Women in Leadership Positions especially Health & Security**

*A real representation of women in leadership and decision making positions especially in the field of health services affects greatly the quality of provided services in emergency cases for women and girls in particular. Although women represent the majority ratio in the field of health services and the minister of health is a woman, yet their representation in decision making position is still 'weak'.*

### **Female Workers in Health Services**

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*UNFPA has declared that diseases outbreak affects men and women differently as epidemics increase gender inequality, this is according to guidance note issued by UNFPA on Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020 about COVID-19 from gender perspective. The note revealed that women are the most vulnerable to be infected with the virus and are the most affected in general. This is because of women face a group of danger aspects which should be addressed immediately.*

*Thus women face an increasing danger to be infected with the virus not only because of certain physiological reasons but also because of their disproportionate representation among employees of health care and social services. According to WHO, women represent 70% of labor power in the world in the field of health care and social services in 104 countries whether physicians, nurses, midwives or workers which are the roles which put them in the frontlines in dealing with diseases outbreak. For example, in Hubei province in China, 90% of nursing staff and more than 50% of physicians are women; the matter which led to increased infection cases among women working in medical field in this province.*

### **Recommendations**

- *Women play an important role in combating diseases, so it is necessary to assure that their voices are heard and their demands are recognized and taken into consideration.*
- *Inserting women perspective in planning for the epidemic and decision making. In addition, monitoring and response systems must take gender, age and pregnancy cases into consideration to better understand COVID-19 clearly.*
- *Involving more women in decision making positions and guaranteeing their representation in any formed committees to face COVID-19 on all levels especially health and security levels.*
- *Oblige the sector of the prime minister decision to give the pregnant worker or employee or who takes care of children less than 12 years old an exceptional paid vacation in accordance with this decision and not to be considered from her legal vacations or affect her financial dues.*
- *All women, especially pregnant women, must access safe clean reproductive services and to fulfill their needs in health facilities by specialists. In addition, pregnant*



women infectious with respiratory diseases must be given high priority. Also health units of delivery and babies must be separated from other units which include infectious patients with COVID-19. It is important to provide psychological support for women and girls affected by gender-based violence in addition to health field workers.

- Stop collecting insurances, taxes, electricity bills, water bills, gas bills from poor families kept and supported by women and exempt their sons from education fees (schools and universities).
- In the daily report of the Ministry of Health regarding COVID-19 cases, numbers should be detailed according to gender, age and disability to better understand how the virus spreads and know the better protection means against it.
- Provide social, health and psychological services continuously in addition to protection procedures for domestic violence survivors.
- Providing psychological support services for families and how to deal with pressures resulted from staying at homes and promoting for ways of spending free times and strengthening family cohesion.
- Civil society organizations and media should start taking steps against domestic violence by raising awareness through media means and social media channels to combat domestic violence during the epidemic period.
- Paying and transfer cash aids and provide material services and aids for women who support their families in addition to divorced, separated and fined women.
- Support and raise awareness of families in regard to how to take care of elders and chronic disease patients and to fulfill their needs and raise their spirits.
- Encourage both men and young men to share family responsibilities with women and girls.
- Support male and female workers in health sector from male and female doctors, male and female nurses, service providers and housewives from both material and psychological sides in addition to building their capacities in the field of dealing with domestic violence in particular and patients infected with COVID-19.
- Provide instructions regarding protection against COVID-19 for all society categories especially in faraway areas, use all media means including radio, TV



*channels and social media channels in addition to providing instructions in all languages of people with disabilities.*

- *Guaranteeing that female house workers and daily agricultural workers get their salaries and protect them in such circumstances and assure that work circumstances provide protection for them against the virus.*
- *Often in crisis and disasters times, states take special procedures in regard to punishment policies and deal with male and female prisoners, so we see the necessity of releasing all female elderly prisoners above 60 years old especially those with chronic disease.*
- *Approving exceptional increase in cash support allocations through social security pension and Takaful and Karama pension to face the crisis which highly affects the poorest categories.*
- *Approving an exceptional increase in in-kind support of supply cards.*
- *Stopping any procedures of houses emptying for any reason till the end of the crisis, stopping reporting of refraining from paying rent especially for the poor people kept by women in addition to those who run small or micro small projects especially those who deal with Small and Medium Projects Development Authority and are not covered by law.*
- *Supporting female beneficiaries of social housing in paying their installments especially those highly affected by the crisis.*
- *Uniting and coordinating efforts of civil society organizations to provide an umbrella to protect female breadwinners affected by the epidemic in addition to establishing a plan and database for the female beneficiaries to guarantee that they access the support.*